

PRINCIPLES OF THE LIBERAL PARTY.

Every form of government seems to involve two political elements. The one calling for changes in existing institutions, for relief from the traditions of the past, for a freer citizenship in everything that the name implies—the other not unprogressive in every respect, but nevertheless disposed to resist advanced legislation, the enlargement of the privileges of the many or any recognition of citizenship which can be successfully resisted. These two political forces have been differently named in different countries, and sometimes have been differently named at different periods in the same country. The Whigs and Tories of forty years ago in Great Britain are the Liberals and Conservatives of to-day. But generally in all the Colonies of the Empire, as well as in the Empire itself, the two political parties are recognized by the terms Liberals and Conservatives, and these two terms measurably well represent the policy of the two parties.

In following out the history of the Liberal party in Canada, one is struck with the close analogy between the movements which it supported and by which it is divided from the Conservatives, and movements of a similar character, although on a larger scale, in the history of British politics. It may be that the interchange of opinions between Canada and the Empire had something to do with maintaining the uniformity of political cleavage on kindred subjects, or it may be that the emigrant to Canada carried with him his British politics. At all events, it is some source of gratification for the Liberals of Canada to know that the great movements they inaugurated and to which they consecrated all their energies were movements similar in kind and principle to those which received the support of the great Liberal statesmen of England. When a Canadian on the floor of Parliament or on a public platform declares that no government should make religious opinions a test of citizenship, it might be gratifying to know that such views were entertained by Lord John Russell, John Bright, W. E. Gladstone and all the Liberal lights of the last century. Similarly, when a demand is made for greater freedom of trade, for the extension of the franchise, the protection of the elector at the ballot box, the sovereignty of the people in all matters pertaining to government, purity in the administration of public affairs, the personal integrity of the representatives of the people, these and kindred measures of vast importance to the state have been the watchwords of the Liberal party in Great Britain since the great revolution, and have occupied the thoughts of our ablest and purest statesmen, notably those representing the Liberal party. The historical perspective then of Canadian Liberalism is most satisfactory as well as instructive and would well repay fuller investigation.*

The Liberal party first asserted itself in Upper Canada by boldly protesting against the tyranny of the "Family Compact" and by demanding (1) the exclusion from office of all appointees of the Government; (2) the entire control of all the revenues of the country; and (3) the responsibility of the executive, i.e., the Government, to the people's representatives in Parliament. One of the earliest champions of these reforms was Wm. Lyon Mackenzie, who as a member of Parliament and, as a journalist, had ample opportunities of calling public attention to the grievances from which relief was desirable. Although Mr. Mackenzie did not conduct the agitation for the reforms which he demanded, at all times with becoming moderation, yet he drew very distinctly a line of separation between the progressive policy of true Liberalism and the claims of Conservatives of that time by "divine right" to occupy all the public offices and to hold the reins of Government, with the public consent when they could, and without public approval when they dared.**

After the Union of 1841, the distinctive character of Liberal principles was represented by Mr. Robert Baldwin, who will always be remembered as the sturdy champion of responsible Government. Mr. Baldwin held that all appointments to office should be made by the Governor-General on the recommendation of his advisers, and that a Government that could not command a majority of the members of Parliament should at once give place to a Government having a majority.

*See Gladstone and his Contemporaries, by Thomas Archer; Life of John Bright, Richard Cobden, Lord John Russell's Reminiscences, Life of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Gladstone's Speeches.

**See Life of Wm. Lyon Mackenzie by Charles Lindsay.